

VINTAGE REPORT 1994 FROM GERMANY

1st October 1994

Once again, the vineyards fared through the winter months without suffering any damage. A fact which we nowadays almost take for granted. One easily tends to forget the hazards which nature provides, especially after the run of good to great vintages since 1988. The 1980 crop, for example, was a complete and utter disaster (4.7 million hectolitres) and the 1979 was partly devastated (particularly on the Saar) after the damage caused by the overnight arrival of arctic weather conditions end of December 1978.

1994, however, followed closely in the great footsteps of 1993 with an early bud-break. May was disappointing with temperatures below average and too much rain. The dismal weather continued until 10th June with night temperatures down to 8 C (45 F), which slowed down growth. Ideal warm and dry weather (not below 12C, 51F at night) then took over until 27th June, by which time the flowering had been very successfully completed, e.g. Erbacher Marcobrunn by 20th June, 2½ weeks earlier than in 1984. A *textbook* summer followed, hot and dry through till end of August. The vines were thus thankful for the preceding wet May. The weather conditions and the restricted spraying in line with the return to natural methods of cultivation did cause unaccustomed widespread *Oidium* (mildew) with considerable losses, but the effected berries dried out and have not impaired the quality to any great extent.

Rain came end of August until 5th September, which proved ideal for Riesling and other late-ripening varieties, but too late for the early-ripening varietal Müller-Thurgau. The weather remained unsettled and cool until 20th September, giving rise to further losses from rotting, but here again, excellent dry weather has prevailed since then, despite poor weather forecasts, to prevent further damage.

These two weeks have been the key to quality for the 1994 vintage. The Oechsle readings have increased by at least 1⁰/day and picking of Riesling is now commencing. Thanks to the long vegetation period and great summer,

the acidity structure of the musts contains at least 75% ripe tartaric acid and we can thus expect very appealing fruity wines with good concentration, the final quantities and predicate levels depending on the weather during October. Siegerrebe picked 14th September in Nierstein only reached 83⁰ Oechsle (top-ranking Kabinett), but later pickings are into Spätlese and Auslese; Ortega readings above 130⁰ Oechsle (Beerenauslese) have been reached this last week.

Estimations for the total crop remain very uncertain due to the above-mentioned facts, but we can expect for 1994 a similar quantity as in 1993 (9.7 million hectolitres), perhaps marginally below this figure due to the losses incurred which have naturally reduced the large onset of fruit after the excellent flowering.

A more detailed assessment will follow early November. Bulk must prices for generic wines have remained firm in the QbA sector with a strengthening of quotations for predicate levels within the generic market. Despite rising costs, putting pressure on the estates, prices for estate wines have virtually remained stable (in DM) since 1989, resulting from the wide selection of outstanding predicate wines from the row of vintages 1989-1993 and the difficult economic situation. Wines with great potential which now represent excellent value for money.

2nd November

1994

A magnificent golden October has excelled all hopes mentioned in our report 1st October! Nineteen days and nights of unbroken dry and fine weather followed between 4-22nd October, the temperatures even reaching summer levels of 18C (61F) during the week 10-16th October; although a temperature drop to -1C on 6th October ended photosynthesis in unprotected areas. Intermittent rain showers last week delayed final pickings in some of the top sites on the Mosel-Saar-Ruwer, but the majority of the estates had completed the harvest by 23rd October.

First pickings on the Saar were below those results in the Mosel valley, but improved immensely towards end of October, top sites such as the Scharzhofberg and Ockfener Bockstein are still being picked this week! Acidity levels started at 12g/l and decreased end of October to an ideal 10.5g/l. Must degrees in the Ockfener Bockstein have varied between 75 and 125 Oechsle, resulting in good quantities of Kabinett and Spätlese with some fine Auslese and berry-selected BA. Total yields on the Saar are higher than the very low 1993 results in that area, but still below average at about 50hl/ha.

The total picture is therefore very positive, other areas also having profited from the splendid October weather. The 1994 vintage can readily claim to meet every requirement from table wine to TBA. Seldom before has a vintage resulted in such a spread of quality. Former vintages ending in "4" have been disappointing, such as 1984, 1974 or the ghastly 1954. The 1964 was however successful with more noble rot, which also resulted in high average Oechsle and stable acidity levels. The 1994 summer with temperatures up to 40C (96 F) in the shade even surpassed 1976 with its record 38C, but the heatwave lasted two weeks longer in 1921, from June to August. The stable weather in October has resulted in even better *Spitzenweine* than in the great 1989 vintage, Riesling Spätlese and Auslese approaching the 1990 or 1993 vintages, and Riesling Kabinett to match the 1992 wines! The 1994 wines promise to explode with ripe fruit aromas, and show a firm structure.

Riesling regards,
Derek Vinnicombe

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WINE BROKERS • CONSULTANTS
Weinbergstrasse 62, D-55297 Nackenheim/Germany